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THE STORY OF WHITE ROCK

By: Francis R. Bellamy

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WHITE ROCK

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FRANCIS R. BELLAMY



The Laurel Hospital, White Rock, North Carolina



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RODE up a narrow trail in the North Carolina mountains. I was some twenty miles from the nearest railroad. The road had been dwindling steadily for some hours, as it took its way over ridge after ridge, followed stream after stream, crossed bridge after bridge and climbed steadily toward the land of the sky. About us for hours had been only the precipitous landscape of the mountains: rocky creeks and steep hills, soft, weatherbeaten log cabins set along watercourses that scarred the wooded slopes, a changing vista of forest and sky.

And then abruptly, we rounded a shoulder of the hills and stretched out before us, shimmering in the late afternoon sunlight, lay an open valley in whose center stood a large modern building. Beyond, as behind, stretched a wilderness. Far up above us towered a half cleared mountain. But in the valley stood the surprising building, accompanied by a couple of modern houses and an up-to-date white schoolhouse with a steeple.

I stared at it with considerable surprise.

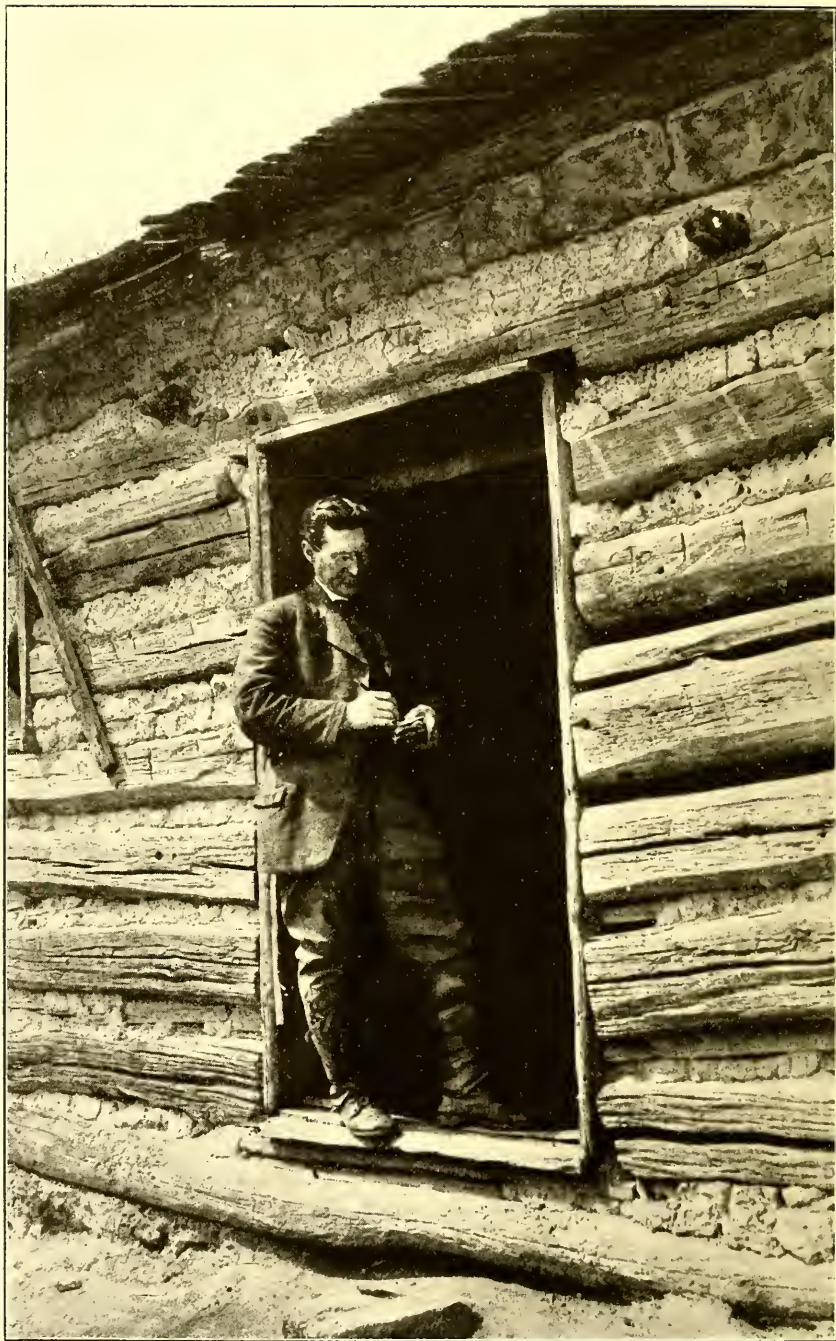
“Who ever dragged all this material up here and built this place? And why?” I inquired.

“That’s Laurel hospital,” said my guide. “White Rock.”

Three days later I had the story. . . .

A number of persons had a hand in it—Dr. Warren H. Wilson and Dr. W. E. Finley of the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions, the late John C. Campbell of the Russell Sage Foundation and many others, but my story is not about these, splendid and devoted though their help has been, or even about the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions which

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Dr. George H. Packard

has general oversight of the hospital and of other constructive, healthful, educational and religious work in these mountains. My story is rather about two persons who have put their lives into this enterprise and have given all they had to its success.

Some twenty years ago—I learned—up in Cleveland, Ohio, a minister's daughter by the name of Frances Goodrich became interested in the home mission work of her father's church. It was the day of the starting of the Settlement houses in many of our great cities. But this young girl's mind had been aroused in a different direction. She had visited a girl's school in Asheville, North Carolina, and become acquainted there with some of the girls who came to school from the mountain regions of the South. The things they told her about their lives and homes aroused a great desire in her to help them in the efforts they were planning to make to take education and happiness and health back with them into the mountains, once their school days were over. They invited her to come and visit them. She accepted. And for a summer she lived in the mountains.

She found there the conditions which the girls had described—conditions which were typical of the southern mountains twenty years ago: poor but beautiful log cabins, with little patches of tobacco and corn, set in remote wooded, mountain valleys, cut off from the outside world by impassable roads and creeks, and inhabited by a pure Scotch-Irish race struggling against primitive conditions, but possessed of some of the best blood of America, if only given a chance. The same blood from which Abraham Lincoln came—a blood that hungered for education and a chance and yet found no opportunity.

She found that the average length of the school term in most of the valleys was from three to six weeks a year, according to the size of the school fund and the salary paid to the so-called teacher. Twenty-five to fifty dollars was the usual sum set aside for education in these valleys. And



Real Christian service—carrying healing and Christian friendship to a mountain home thirty miles from a railroad.

out of that came the pay for the teacher and the wood for the fire and all the other things that were necessary! Many of the teachers were men and women of the neighborhood who had never learned to read or write themselves. The pupils were growing up no better off.

The case of the mothers of these pupils was even worse.

Marriage came early in the mountains. And with marriage the woman not only bore the children and did the housework, but split the wood, drew the water, hoed the garden and worked in the fields with her husband, in an effort to wrest a living from the sterile soil. At thirty a woman was often old, and hope and beauty had died together. And so hard was the life and so scarce was money, that for men, women and children, education seldom opened the book of dreams from childhood to the grave. Only here and there an exceptional person learned to read the Bible and either became a woods preacher or the head

of his clan. As for the rest, old age found them just 'a-settin,' staring dimly across the mountains waiting for death, unable to read, unable to write, alone with their thoughts—while for their children the same weary cycle started over again once more.

The thing burnt itself deep into the soul of Frances Goodrich. Here was a need which was crying to be met. It was only a question of some one really doing something about it. It would mean a great deal to these children if some one would merely supplement the meagre school funds so that a real teacher could be brought in to teach school all winter through. Why could she not do that? Begin a new kind of home mission work by bringing the light of knowledge to these little children of the mountains?

When she went north that first year she had decided that she could. She did not rest either until she had begged from her father's church and from other interested people



Dr. Packard on an errand of mercy

enough money to support one teacher for a year in the mountain hamlet of Riceville. And with the teacher she herself went, resolved to live in these mountains herself until she understood her new neighbors and understood just what their problems were.

By the end of winter she knew she was on the right track and had evolved a definite plan for social work in the mountains. She would bring a teacher into every mountain community that needed one and had not the money. She would build a house where none existed in which the teacher could live. More, she would persuade a community worker to come and live with each teacher as a companion—a community worker who could help the women who were too old now to go to school. She herself could teach the children the things she had been taught, Presbyterian Sunday School and all. Perhaps, too, the community workers might be able to help revive the old household arts of sewing and weaving and basketry which some mountain homes still practised. She and her helpers might not be able to teach the women of the mountains to make cornbread any better, but they could teach them how to dye and make over old men's clothes into children's garments, they could show them how to can beans so that the product did not turn sour—they could show them a good many things. Above all, they could bring the light of knowledge into the hills and stir the imaginations of the hill people to "do for themselves." Where money was in question, she could certainly count upon her father's church—that was already back of her—and in time other Presbyterian churches which approved of such work.

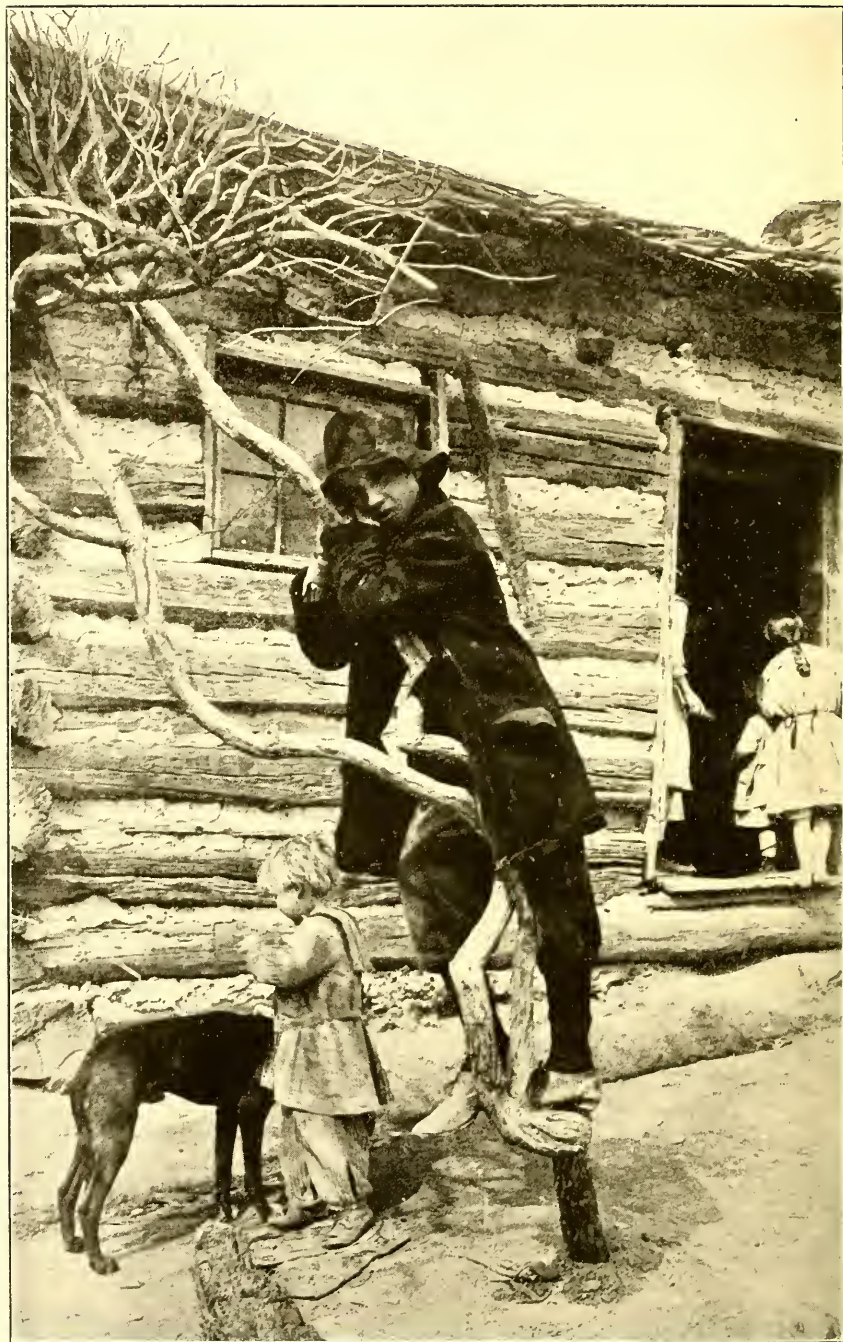
For fifteen years, then, she carried out that plan, winning the confidence of the mountain people, supporting their schools and standing back of them, meeting little groups of strange men in isolated cabins to explain her purposes and to demand their school funds, establishing Sunday schools here and there, gathering about her many devoted followers. In one isolated valley after another she

built her houses. From church after church in the East she begged her money and supplies. Year after year she went about the mountains on her faithful horse, ministering, building, teaching, pushing on her idea with unflagging courage—a veritable little Bishop of Laurel, as they call her in the mountains today. It is a tribute both to her character and to the chivalry of the mountains that never once in those years of solitary living, alone except for other women, never once in those years of following the lonely trails was she ever attacked or even threatened.

There comes a day, however, to every pioneer when he realizes that he has come as far as he can. It was one day about eight years ago that Miss Goodrich realized it. Educationally, the road had been cleared. But what her mountain neighbors needed as badly as anything now, she realized, was a doctor. She and her little case of simple medicines had never made any impression on the mist of ignorance about health and sanitation and cleanliness which pervade the hills. That conviction had been slowly growing on her for years, borne in upon her unforgettably on days when she had been forced to “lay out” corpses herself in remote ridges, on nights when she had had to nurse some child through a terrible fever in an isolated cabin, with little knowledge and no helps of any kind.

Would it be possible, she wondered, to persuade a really good doctor to come down in these mountains as her partner? No ordinary man would come, she knew—and only an unusual man would be of the slightest use. Where could she find such a man?

For a good many months she tried in vain to find such a man. And then one day Providence sent a friend to a private hospital in a pleasant suburban town in distant Massachusetts—Medford, just outside Boston. To Dr. Packard, the head of the hospital, her friend told the story of Frances Goodrich, and Dr. Packard listened with an odd lump in his throat. His own wife had been a missionary in China all through the Boxer trouble and he knew what



It was for children like these that Miss Goodrich sought schools and a hospital

such work meant, even if he was a Boston doctor, doing dispensary work in the city and running a private hospital in Medford.

The thing made so great an impression on him that a few weeks later he talked to Miss Goodrich herself. That same fall found himself and his wife driving into the North Carolina mountains, seeing for themselves what sort of place Laurel was, and wondering, in the cold, foggy October day, if they would have the courage Frances Goodrich had had to come and live here, cut off from all civilization. Six months later they had given up the hospital in Medford, said goodbye to New England, and were on their way into the mountains, almost before spring had ceased swelling the creeks and the rhododendron and laurel had begun to bloom on the mountain sides.

Frances Goodrich had found her partner. . . .

At first glance, one might be inclined to assume that for Dr. Packard the way had been made easy, that Frances Goodrich's doctor had only to step into the niche which she had created for him in the minds of the mountain folk. But nothing could be further from the truth. Probably not even Packard himself realized the complexities and hardships of the job he had taken upon himself until he started to unpack his belongings in the house in the valley at Allegheny, and looked around at the mere physical difficulties of his own household. Pioneering, thirty miles from a railway, with only a saddle horse as a means of communication, was not going to be an easy task, in any event.

And that was not his real job, of course. The real job was going to be the endless trouble and difficulty of winning the confidence of these new neighbors and prospective patients of his, rendered suspicious and hostile by their generations of solitude and loneliness, and by their experience with unscrupulous strangers.

Disregarding all the stories of blood feuds and shootings and suspicion of strangers, the primitive conditions of dirt and ignorance under which he would have to work—why, to

be a doctor at all, even to minister to these people, leaving out all question of failure or success, was going to be a job that would tax all his powers, both human and professional. There had never been a real doctor living in these mountains; only an occasional travelling quack who had salves and doses for a quarter a throw. He would have to educate the mountains to what a real doctor was!

And yet he could see already the cycle of progress which Frances Goodrich and her friends had set in motion. In some places already the townships were raising more and more money for their own schools, the length of time teachers must be supported from outside was growing shorter, graduates of Miss Goodrich's own schools were returning from the Normal School at Asheville themselves to teach in the mountain schools. The ideas which she had preached in the early days were showing in the great fairs and community work of the more wide awake valleys and towns, while the old household arts, such as weaving and basketry and the like, had become an established industry that brought money back in the hills year after year. The mist of ignorance was decidedly rising as education came slowly and surely into the homes. He need only to begin somehow, somewhere, to set in motion his own cycle of health and the fight against disease. And in time, whether in his lifetime or another's, the rest would follow. . . .

And so he began.

The first call came almost at once: a woman at the door, asking his wife for help—asking if he weren't the new "fotched-in" doctor from out of the mountains—begging for help for a woman in the throes of childbirth down the valley. And he saddled his horse and set out.

A halloo at midnight, about three days later, a call from some mounted men who sat their horses outside his gate in the moonlight—strangers stand outside the gate in the North Carolina mountains!—and after his first moment of suspicion of his visitors, he knew he had his second call. An hour later he found himself cutting a bullet from a badly

hurt leg in the center of a group of men at a wedding celebration in a cabin miles back in the hills, where he knew no one in sight and could not for the life of him have found the mountain road back to his own home in Allegheny. The guests had begun shooting humorously at each other's feet and in the excitement someone had made a mistake.

Soon, then, he found he was in it. Only a volume, indeed, could ever do justice to those first months on Laurel, as he rode over the mountains by day and by night, into distant coves, sometimes in icy sleet that made his stirrups useless and his body a frozen burden, sometimes in the terrific downpours of the mountain storms, in pitch dark night when he could not see his own horse's head before him. Few nights then when he could sleep the night through or when he could be sure of a moment at home.

A widespread custom in the mountains of waiting until nightfall to see if the patient might not be better, before riding over the mountains to call the doctor! An almost universal habit, too, of waiting until disease had definitely gotten the upper hand and death appeared as an imminent danger, before calling the doctor!

And yet before the first few months were over, Dr. Packard knew that he would never leave the mountains now, until he had succeeded. By fall, indeed, for him the struggle had resolved itself quite definitely into just two things: an iron resolve to win these new friends of his, and then to build them a hospital. He could almost feel the wall of suspicion now, of course. He could feel it in the way some people tried to catch him in misstatements, however slight. He could feel it in the efforts that were made to find him at fault in his diagnoses and treatments, in the dim hints he heard from some of his faithful neighbors that his sanity, even, had been brought into question.

Why did this stranger come in to doctor up Laurel—the suspicious inquired—if he meant what he said: that he did not do it for money? He charged fees in spite of that, did he not? Fifty cents or a dollar for a call, and maybe just

a word or two! The little Bishop of Laurel had never done that.

That was the mutter among the suspicious, back in the mountains.

But he would overcome that, Packard had decided; and then he would build a hospital here as he and Miss Goodrich had often talked beside the fire in her house. For only a hospital would ever really solve the health problem for these mountain settlements—a place where the sick and injured could be brought at once to be cared for by a nurse, and washed clean and given proper food. It was fifty miles to Asheville, the nearest hospital, now. And half his struggle was against the frightful soot and manure which terrified relatives thrust into cuts and wounds because there was no place to take the sufferer; against the greasy food which was poured into weak, ill stomachs; against the ignorance which made turpentine a cure-all for burns and made childbirth a terror.

A hospital, however small, would change all that and give the women and children of the mountains a chance!

Night after night, as he sat up with some child with membranous croup in a bare, cold cabin; as he brought some baby into the world in a backwoods shack, Packard thought of that hospital and what it would do. Day after day, too, as he attended the clinics he had established in six of the outlying valleys—usually at Miss Goodrich's old houses!—he thought of it. And his resolve to win the confidence of these people grew into a passion, a desire that was always with him. He never prayed for assistance in some hollow high up in the ridges as he lanced some ugly, black leg in the hope of averting blood poisoning and losing a case, that he did not add a prayer for his own mission.

Would he ever be able to break down the wall of suspicion?

It was one night in the summer that the answer to that question came at last. He had just gotten home after some thirty miles of night riding and work when a man brought

word that Jimmison Tweed lay dying. Jimmison Tweed was the head of the Tweed family, one of the leading men of Laurel and the mountains. Packard knew that as he started wearily for White Rock. He knew, too, as soon as he examined him, that Jimmison Tweed lay dying of appendicitis. If he operated for appendicitis before this crowd of mountaineers (there was always a crowd around the doctor when he visited a patient), and Tweed died of the shock!—well, his work in these mountains would be over forever, whether he lived through the night or not.

All the suspicion against “furriners” and “fotched-on” doctors, the hostility of the generations since the first Tweed had bought his farm of a thousand acres for ten cents an acre—all this would fuse into one flame against him and destroy the confidence of Laurel in him forever. His six months’ work would vanish like mist, and with it Miss Goodrich’s hopes.

But it was a case of life or death, and an operation was the only chance for life. So he operated. He performed it in the light from the big lamps from the village church—the first one crashed to the floor from its beam just as he began, and he drove a huge spike to hold the second one!—he did it in the dim cottage on the bare table, with the preacher giving the ether, while the Tweeds crowded every window and doorway. Minute after minute past while Jimmison Tweed hung on to his life and Packard hung on to it with him; got the appendix and cut it out; put Jimmison all back into place. Then he staggered out into the darkness of the yard, his nerves worn with the strain, but in his mind the knowledge that he had not failed, and that all Laurel, for once, must know it. They had seen the diseased appendix. . . .

Three days and nights Packard sat by that bedside until the crisis passed and the old man was out of immediate danger. But when, on the third day, he wearily climbed his horse, he had won the heart of the mountains. And when he returned and stayed until all danger was past, Laurel had given its confidence forever.

Before a month was over, Packard knew that for certain—by the amount of calls that came to him! But it was work now with a goal that flamed always in sight. The hospital was possible now. The educational work that Miss Goodrich had started would find a parallel in the medical work, and her dream of long ago would be on the way to realization. He had made good in the mountains, and she had a partner. Like some kind of Holy Grail to a Crusader of old, that hospital was to Dr. Packard.

It was never out of his mind as he went deeper and deeper into the confidence of the mountain folk and became not only their doctor but their friend and adviser as well. They say in the hills now that there isn't anything Dr. Packard hasn't done for his friends of Laurel, from operating on cows and sows whose loss would have meant hunger, to major operations on injured men in the logging camps, far from the roads—places where it was necessary for him to ride on a hand car while the lumber men pushed him far up the hills. A versatile talent, these mountains require! And all the time he was teaching as he went, not only health and sanitation and good cooking, but his own simple faith in God.

Nor was Miss Goodrich idle. Day and night her little group of workers were concentrating on the hospital plan, estimating the costs, arguing the location, but she herself was launching more and more ambitious appeals to the Board of Home Missions and to her church supporters all over the North. She could add a hospital now, if she could raise the money! A hospital which the Board could run once it was completed, and in running order like her own work!

By the time five acres of land beneath Sapling Ridge had been given by Jimmison Tweed and the plans and cost of the building estimated and completed, in city after city little groups of women and children had begun to raise the money—in Sunday schools, and Aid Societies, from firms and individuals. In White Rock itself the local pastor

auctioned off the thousand feet of waterpipe from the reservoir on top of the mountain down to the hospital itself—auctioned it off foot by foot so that every man, woman and child on Laurel could have a share with Jimmison Tweed in the new Laurel Hospital.

And almost overnight, so it seemed to the valley, the thing was accomplished, and under the shadow of the mountains, just above the last community house built by Miss Goodrich, the white hospital building stood, to surprise chance visitors who rounded the shoulder of the hills.

In the clear afternoon Dr. Packard took me over the place. It is a perfect little compact hospital of its kind, built on the unit plan—they say the architect did not make a single change in the plans which Dr. and Mrs. Packard had drawn—with wide halls and beds for sixteen patients at a time; with a men's ward and a women's ward, big closets filled with linen, pajamas and all the things devoted church women up North make for it every month. There is an operating room to make the heart of a surgeon glad. No more operating on kitchen tables by lamplight on Laurel now, with that room, its immaculate instruments and electric light, and nearby the showerbaths and the closets of bandages all sterilized. When the exigencies of the case require it, specialists from Asheville can be accommodated with all they need, and lives saved that before had not the slightest chance.

There are perfect arrangements downstairs, too, for cooking and serving all the different kinds of foods which hospital patients require.

“Yes,” the doctor assured me with a twinkle, “Mrs. Packard attends to all that. Her experience in Medford and China is coming in handy now. I could never have done any of this without her, or without the devoted, self-sacrificing nurses I have had—Miss Mabel Rich, Miss Harrington and Miss Gardner, and the rest—nurses who have worked endlessly and faithfully without thought of such things as hours or remuneration.”

There was a kind of *noblesse oblige*, indeed, I found, among the workers in this hospital in the mountains—from the retired school teacher of sixty who helps Mrs. Packard to the most recent nurse who usually devotes her “time off” to pulling teeth in the big dental chair for stray mountaineers.

“Why not?” she replied to my question. “That’s what we are here for!”

Dr. Packard has an associate doctor, too, now—Dr. E. C. Holden.

“We divide our time so that someone is always here,” Dr. Packard told me. “When you have ridden fifteen miles over these mountains to get the doctor or to bring an injured person with you, you don’t want to find the hospital dark and the doctor eighteen miles away and not expected back until morning. Dr. Holden has taken hold in fine style, too. We call him the Three-in-One doctor, because he is physician, machinist and electrician. You have to be a Jack-of-All-Trades here.”

A road now runs all the way from White Rock to Marshall. On this road, opposite the hospital, there is a new white schoolhouse where one hundred and fifty children will be taught for a full eight-month term. Three teachers are employed for the full time. You should hear the children sing their “Keep Well, Keep Strong” song set to the air of “Dixie.” They have hot lunches at noon, too—a result achieved largely by Mrs. Packard.

Dr. Packard has his eye on every child. They come over here to his office once a month and he examines them, weighs them and treats them when it is necessary. The competition in order to gain weight is like a World’s Series used to be back in Boston. Many of them suffer from under-nourishment still—that is the curse of the mountains—but the doctor has gotten hold of them now and won’t let go. He knows their parents and their parents know him.

I slept that night in a room off the veranda, by the front office door. I had been up with Dr. Packard since five that

morning. But I did not sleep well. I had confused dreams in which whispering voices and locomotive whistles mingled with the sound of horses' hoofs.

It was the sharp buzz of the night bell, however, resounding down the silent hospital halls, that got me up finally to grope for my watch and to notice that grey shadows of mist filled the valley at this hour of four-thirty. Down by the fence, several horses were tied and I could hear voices. I dressed and went out and found Dr. Packard already in his office, filling his saddlebags with small packages.

"A new case?" I inquired.

"Several," he said. "They usually come in the night, you know. The first was a bad case of blood poisoning. The second an operation on a woman. The last one was a fractured leg from the logging camp. The husband of the woman stole the logging engine and brought his wife down to the valley on that, so the broken leg man had to come on a hand car. Didn't you hear the whistle about two o'clock?"

"But who owns the horses outside?" I asked.

"Oh, that's the case I'm going on now," he said, as he led the way out to the broad veranda. "Another baby due over on Shelton Laurel."

"But even doctors must sleep," I protested.

His grey eyes twinkled.

"We must take our sleep when we get it," he responded. "We couldn't rest until we got our hospital here. And now we can't rest because we have it!"

And he mounted his horse, waved his hand and rode off around the bend toward Shelton Laurel.

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